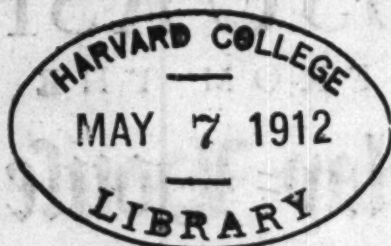


Mr. COLLIER's
DISSUASIVE
FROM THE
Play-House ;
See IN A
LETTER
TO A
Person of Quality,
Occasion'd by the late Calamity of the
TEMPEST.

DUBLIN:

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Gift of
John Craig

S I R,

I Remember the last time I waited on you, you express'd a very Christian Concern at the Disorders of the *Play-House*; you lamented its having so much the Ascendent of the *Town*, (and the Countenance of *Figure* and *Fortune*. You seem'd to presage, that these Nurseries of Licence and Atheism, would, if unrestrain'd, prove fatal to the Nation; make us ripe for Destruction, and pull down some terrible Vengeance upon our Heads. Being thus uneasie in your Prospect, and particularly solicitous for the Conduct of your Family and Relations, you were pleas'd to desire me to draw up something by way of Preservative, in as narrow a Compass as possible. For as you observe, in Cases of Conscience and Morality, some People are so frightfully nice and impatient, that you must either cure them *extempore*, or not at all; The Bill must be short, and the Medicine quickly swallow'd, or else they'll rather dye, than come under the Doctor.

Sir, waying other Reasons of Regard for you, your Request proceeds

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from

from so commendable a Motive, that upon this single Score, I think my self oblig'd to endeavour your Satisfaction.

And here give me leave to suggest to you, that having already in the *View* of the Stage spoken pretty largely to this point, it will be impossible for me to pursue the Design without falling upon some of the Thoughts of that Performance : And since the Argument is thus forestall'd, your Candour, I question not, will make a Proportionable Allowance.

To begin; The bad Complexion, and Danger of this Diversion, may be set forth :

First, From the representing Vice under Characters of Advantage, Dissolution of Manners, is the greatest Favourite of the Modern *Muses* : To be thorough paced in that which is Ill, is the chief recommending Quality. A finish'd Libertine seldom fails of making his Fortune upon the Stage : Thus qualified, there is great Care taken to furnish him with Breeding and Address : He is presently put into a Post of Honour, and an Equipage of Sense ; and if he do's the Worst, he is pretty sure of speaking the best Things ; I mean the most lively and entertaining. And all

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rality of
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all to hold forth this profitable Instruction, (for so they must be interpreted) That Lewdness and Irreligion are the true Test of Quality and Education. If a Man will be just to the Interest of Reputation, he must throw off the Restraints of Virtue, set up for a Sceptick, and launch boldly into a Course of Vice. For if he will be brow-beaten by the other World, and over-aw'd by the Whimfies of Conscience, this is the VVay to pass for a Clown, to taint his Blood, and almost make him Disclaim'd at the *Herald's Office* ! And that this wholesome Doctrine may be the better received, the Poets have taken care to raise their *Ban* and *Arrier-Ban* upon all that's Sacred and Solemn, and to persecute Virtue under every Appearance. And when they make bold with a Character of Religion, they never fail of shewing it clumsy and ridiculous. Such a Person must be an Original in Untowardness, the Jest of the Company, and put into all the Disguises of Folly and Contempt. And when Religion is thus banter'd, and Virtue dress'd up in Antick, when Lewdness appears in Circumstances of Credit, and makes such a shining Figure; when Rewards and Punishments are under

under so just a Distribution, the Government of the *Stage* must needs be surprizing regular, and improve the Audience to Admiration!

Secondly, Another Reason for the *Dissuasive*, is the intolerable Profaneness of the *Stage*. And here not to mention their Swearing in all the Excesses of Distraction, and making bold with the Name of God on the most trivial and scandalous Occasions: This tho' horrible enough, is the least part of the Charge, Their Courage on this Head is of an amazing Size: They are Hero's beyond any thing upon Record, and in a manner perfectly new in their Defiance: They have attempt'd as it were to scale the Sky, and Attack the Seat of Omnipotence: They have blasphem'd the Attributes of God, ridicul'd his Providence, and burlesqu'd the *Old and New Testament*. These infernal Salleys put me in Mind of a late Instance of Resolution in one of their Fraternity; I mean the Man that acted *Jephtha's Rash Vow*, or the *Virgin Sacrifice* in *Smithfield*. The Subject of this Farce is taken out of the Book of *Judges*: And to piece up the Entertainment, and it may be to make the History ridiculous, there are several buffooning Characters

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tagg'd to the end on't. Now can there be a more Irreligious Insolence than to mix the most solemn, and the most ridiculous Things together; to prostitute the Inspired VVritings in Places of Infamy, and to furnish out a Droll from the Sacred History. I hope it will be the last time the *Bible* will be shown for a *Sight* at *Bartholomew-Fair*.

I am unwilling to say any more upon this Matter: To suppose the Outrage of such a Practice stands in need of Satyr and Aggravation, is a Reflection upon the Common Sense of a Nation, and looks as if we were blasted in our Understandings.

Thirdly, The next thing I shall remark is the Indecency of their Language: And here the English Poets, and *Players* are still like themselves; they strain to a Singularity of Coarseness: the modern *Theaters* of *Europe* are meer *Vestals* to them: They outdo the Liberties of *Greece* and *Rome*, the Ages of Ignorance, and the Precedents of Heathenism. The *Lasciviousness* of double Entendres, and remote Glances wont serve their Turn: To flash a little upon the Imagination, and appear in the Twy-light, is not Mischief enough, No: They love to have their

Sense

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Sense clear and determin'd : They labour for Perspicuity, and shine out in Meridian Scandel. They make the Description rank, bring the Images close, and shew the Monster in its full Proportions. And by this Stench the Spirits are insensibly seiz'd, and the Health of the Company often suffers. Thus the Impressions of Modesty wear off, the Affections are debauch'd, and the Memory furnish'd with Ammunition to play upon the Conscience. And is this Diversion for Christians? Is this suitable to that Holiness of Doctrine, to that Sobriety of Thought prescrib'd by the Gospel, or to that Taste of Satisfaction we expect in the other world : Can the Ladies be Entertain'd with such Stuff as this? Those that Dress their Diet, would make us believe their Palates are strangely out of Order. To Treat the Reservedness of their Sex, their Birth and their Breeding with Smut and Ribaldry, is, to speak softly, incomprehensible Manners. In short, it will be said, and therefore I shall put the Case ; *either the Ladies are pleased with the Indecencies of the Stage, or they are not* : If they are, 'tis a hard Imputation on their Virtue : It argues they have strangely forgotten the Engagements

ments of *Baptism*, the Maxims of Education, and the Regards of their Character. 'Tis a sigh they are strongly seiz'd by the Infection, and that the *Tokens* are almost ready to break out. *If they are not pleased*, 'twill be enquired why they come there? why they venture upon a Place where they must expect to have their Imagination shock'd, their Aversion put into a Fit, and their Blood call'd up into their Faces? who would undergo so much Fatigue of Fancy and Mortification? The *Play-House* is without Doubt the wrong Place for Discipline; and such Penance if often repeated will never pass for good Earnest. Thus the Dilemma bears hard towards the Ladies: And for my Part, I Confess, I have not Logick enough to Disengage them.

Fourthly, We must not forget the Incorrigibleness of the *Stage*; This is a farther Aggravation of their Disorder: Their ill Plays have been some of them Examin'd, their Licentious Extravagance mark'd, and repeated Instances produced upon them. In short, the Ulcer has been Dissected, the Criminals dragg'd out, and the Blasphemy expos'd. The Poets, 'tis true, rally'd upon the Defeat, and made the most of View of
the Stage.
their

their Matters. But finding the Cause too gross and defenceless, and that the force of Truth would prevail; they have since lay'd down, and left the Field. But this is not all; The *Players* have met with farther Instruction: The Laws have been let loose upon them; They have been disciplin'd at *Westminster Hall*. However, all this Conviction and Discouragement wont do. They are Proof against Reason and Punishment, against Fines and Arguments, and come over again with their old Smut and profaness. One would think by their desperate Pushing, they were resolv'd to exterminate Religion, and subdue the Conscience of the Kingdom. And I must needs say, rheir Measures are not taken amiss. They have without Doubt pitched upon the most likely Expedient to make Vice absolute, and Atheism universal.

And as if the old *Batteries* were too weak, They have strengthened the Attack, and levied *Recruits* of Musick and Dancing beyond Sea. There was great Occasion, on Question, to draw down more Forces upon *Flesh and blood*; and to spring a new mine to help storm the Senses, and blow up the Passions to Combustion! And when People are thus

thus thrown off their Guard, and disarm'd of their Discretion, the *Play-House* is admirably furnish'd with *Provision* to Seize the Advantage, and improve the Opportunity. For what is it but the common Receptacle of Vice, and the *Rendezvous* of Rakes and Strumpets? I don't mean all the Company are such. But this I may say, that scarce any Quarter is so plentifully stock'd. Now who would trust his Health in a place of Mortality, or go to the *Pest-House* for Recreation?

What then, must we never see a Play? And where's the Harm on't, if we don't, Can't we take an ill Thing upon Report, without the Curiosity of Experience? Is it not better to stand off from unnecessary Danger, than to press upon a formidable Enemy, and run the Hazard of a Defeat? However, if young People are so uneasy at such a Restraint; if they will needs venture, let them fortifie themselves at Home, and take the Guard of Religion along with them: Let them go as they do to see an outlandish Monster, once in their Life time: Let the Play be prescribed them by Persons of Conduct and Sobriety: In a Word, let the Snake be frozen, and the Poison as much diluted as 'tis possible. And

And after all, I don't pretend to give a Licence for seeing the *Play-House*, though under the Cautions above-mention'd : But if People will rush forward, and stand the Event, I only desire to direct the Motion, and suggest the safest Way.

Fifthly, The *Play-House* has been look'd on as a publick Nuisance, censur'd and discountenanc'd by *Church and State*, and that in times both Ancient and Modern.

To give some Instances in the *State*.

The Republick of *Rome*, before *Julius Caesar* stopt the building of a Theatre, being fully convinc'd, that this Diversion would bring in foreign Vice, that the Old *Roman* Virtue would be lost, and the Spirits of the People emasculated. This wise Nation made the Function of *Players* scandalous, seiz'd their Freedoms, and threw them out of Privilege and Reputation.

To come down to our own Constitution : the *Players* are forbidden to Act, and scatter their Infection through the Kingdom, under very severe and infamous Penalties. And in the Reign of the Famous Queen *Elizabeth*, there was an Order of Queen and Council, to drive the *Players* out of the City and Liberties

Defence
of the
View, &c.
p. 85.

View of
the Stage,
chap. 6.

39 Eliz.
chap. 4.

Liberties of *London*, and to pull down the *Theaters*, which was Executed accordingly. In *France* some few Years since the *Italian Players* were expell'd the Kingdom, and now the *French Stage* lies under Excommunication. The *Theaters* have been lately shut up in *Italy* by the *Pope*, and in the Territories of *Brandenburgh*, by the King of *Prussia*. And several *European Countries* would never endure them in any Form, or under any Regulation.

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cap. 7.

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the Stage,
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ibid.

As to the *Church*, the *Players* stand Condemn'd by several Councils of great Antiquity and Credit. And the most Celebrated and Primitive Fathers have declaimed loudly against the *Stage*, with all the Zeal, Force and Rhetorick imaginable. So that if the strongest Precedents, either *Church* or *State*, will make any Impression upon us, if we have any Regard for the Wisdom and Piety of the best and most considerable part of Mankind, if Authority will move us, if Reason will convince us, if Experience will teach us, we have the strongest Motives imaginable to stand off from such dangerous Ground.

ibid.

To this I may Observe in the
Sixth Place, That such scandalous
Diversions

Diversion must of Necessity untune our Minds, and dispirit our Devotion. If the Stage once gains our Fancy, the Service of God will grow burthensome and heavy. And when a lascivious Song becomes relishing, a Psalm will be a flat Entertainment. Is it possible for Esteem and contempt to stand together, and can we reverence that which has been our Sport to see despised? To spend the Week at the *Play-House*, and come to *Church* on the *Sunday*, looks little better than Fashion and Grimace. These two Places are strangely hostile and counter-qualifying : For what *Communion has Light with Darkness*,
 2 Cor. 6. and what *Concord has CHRIST with*
 14. 15. *Belial*? If we sit thus in the seat of the scornful, 'tis in vain to approach his Presence, and to tread his Courts.

And therefore in the

Last Place, I shall add, That to frequent the *Play-House* is plainly inconsistent with the Duties and Character of a Christian. For, not to repeat what has been said, the Guilt of the Place must in a great Measure fall upon the *Audience*; To be present, after warning, at the Abuse of Religion, amounts to Consent and Approbation. To delight in ill Company is to become part

of

fortune of it, and all People are *Principals* in Profaneness, as well as in Murther. Every one knows 'tis the Company that supports the *Play-House*. Without a numerous Audience they would be forc'd to disband, to surrender their Business, and, it may be, be discouraged into Reformation. What then? Are we to assist such Places of Liberty and Profaneness with our Purse and Person? Must we keep up the Credit of Debauchery? Must we make a Contribution for Blasphemy, and raise a Tax for the Government *Below*? To countenance such practices must inevitably communicate the Guilt, and heighten the Provocation. And when Wickedness is thus flaming and outrageous, we cannot expect but that Vengeance will quickly follow.

We have lately felt a sad Instance of God's Judgments in the terrible Tempest: Terrible beyond any thing in that Kind in Memory or Record; For not to enlarge on the lamentable Wrecks and Ruins, were we not almost swept into a Chaos? Did not Nature seem to be in her last Agony, and the World ready to expire? And if we go on still in such Sins of Defiance, may we not be afraid of the Punishment of *Sodom*, and that God should destroy us with *Fire and Brimstone*. VVhat

What Impression this late Calamity has made upon the *Play-House*, we may guess by their Acting *Macbeth* with all its Thunder and Tempest, the same Day : Where at they mention of the *Chimnies being blown down*, (*Macbeth*, p. 20) the *Audience* were pleas'd to *Clap*, at an unusual Length of Pleasure and Approbation. And is not the meaning of all this too Intelligible ? Does it not look as if they had a Mind to out-brave the Judgment ? And make us believe the Storm was nothing but an Eruption of *Epicurus's* Atoms, a Spring-tide of Matter and Motion, and a blind Salley of Chance ? This throwing Providence out of the Scheme, is an admirable *Opiate* for the Conscience ! And when Recollection is laid asleep, the *Stage* will recover of Course, and go on with their Business effectually.

Thus, Sir, I have lay'd before you what I have to offer upon this Occasion, and am,

Your most humble Servant.

December 10.
1763.

J. C.

F I N I S.